



**Children's Safeguarding and
Family Help
Checks and searches on alternative
carers**

CONTENTS

Section 1 Introduction

1.1. Policy	2
1.2. Scope	3
1.3. Legal framework	3
1.4. Consent	4
1.5. Confidentiality	5

Section 2 Procedures

2.1. DBS checks	5
2.2. Probation checks	6
2.3. Health reports	7
2.4. Local authority checks	8
2.5. Employment checks	10
2.6. NSPCC checks	11
2.7. Personal references	11
2.8. GP references	12
2.9. Ofsted	12
2.10. Checks with other local authorities	12
2.11. Dealing with replies	13

Section 3 Carrying out checks with other local authorities	14
--	-----------

Section 4 Renewing checks	16
---	-----------

Section 5 Recording information	16
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1 Introduction

1.1 Policy

As a fostering agency, Camden Council is responsible for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of those children who are placed with alternative carers, such as foster carers and family and friends carers.

It is therefore essential that existing carers and applicants who wish to become alternative carers are thoroughly checked in order to ensure the safety of any child who is placed in their care. Responsibility for carrying out these checks on behalf of the council lies with the Fostering and Permanence teams, as they have key responsibility for assessing and reviewing all alternative carers.

This policy sets out the procedures for:

- Undertaking statutory and other checks on all applicants who apply to Camden's Family, Friends and Fostering service to become:
 - foster carers, including daytime respite care and Family Link workers
 - Regulation 24 and family and friends carers
 - private foster carers
 - special guardians.
- Renewing checks on existing carers, as well as carrying out enhanced DBS checks on members of a carer's household and support network who are over the age of 16.

Other local authorities and fostering agencies that are assessing alternative carers or organisations where the person is applying for a job working with children may approach CSFH to ask for information on individuals who live or have lived in the borough. As a social care agency, CSFH is expected to share any relevant information that the division holds on these individuals.

This policy also covers the procedure for carrying out these searches on behalf of other local authorities and fostering agencies, and for facilitating searches that are carried out by other agencies within the borough.

1.2 Scope

This policy applies to all social workers in the Family, Friends and Fostering service and Business Support Service (BSS) officers involved in either renewing checks on existing carers, seeking information on individuals who apply to Camden to become alternative carers, or providing information to other local authorities.

Staff should be mindful that they will need to link in with other council staff in order to carry out checks effectively, for example early help services, education services and adult social care services.

Requests for checks and searches are normally initiated by the BSS officers for CLA services, but social workers are expected to make further enquires where stated within this policy and where information needs to be obtained from abroad.

1.3 Legal framework

Searches that are carried out on existing and prospective alternative carers are based on statutory and regulatory requirements and best practice.

It should be noted that Camden's authority to obtain and provide information on individuals is limited to the specific legal requirements as set out, and it would be a breach of the Data Protection Act 2018 to provide other agencies with information outside of this framework.

For this reason, Camden will only conduct searches for other local authorities and fostering agencies when information is required to check the suitability of an existing or prospective alternative carer as listed above. Requests for checks on panel members or staff should be directed to Human Resources.

Occasionally, Camden may be approached by individuals who have applied to other local authorities and have been asked by that local authority to apply directly to Camden for searches to be undertaken. These requests should be refused, and it should be explained that Camden will only undertake checks when they are formally requested by the assessing local authority.

Checks are taken out pursuant to the following legislation:

- Fostering Services Regulations 2010
- Special Guardianship Regulations 2005
- Private Fostering Regulations 2005.

The following checks are taken out on **all** prospective carers:

- DBS checks
- Probation checks (where the DBS check discloses convictions)
- BAAF Health reports
- Local authority checks (including social services, education, childminding, mental health)
- NSPCC checks
- Employment references
- GP references
- Personal references

For existing carers, the following checks are renewed on a regular basis (see section 4):

- DBS checks
- Probation checks
- BAAF health reports
- Local authority checks
- NSPCC checks.

1.4 Consent to checks and searches

Applicants, existing carers, household members and back up carers must give their signed consent to all checks and searches being carried out, and if they refuse to give consent, they should be informed that their application cannot be considered or their status as an alternative carer for Camden withdrawn.

Consent to DBS checks is indicated on the on-line DBS application. Consent to a medical being carried out is contained in the BAAF medical form AH. Consent to other checks and searches for applicants and members of their household/support network are contained in Camden's application form FP2 which is given to all individuals who wish to apply to become an alternative carer.

Consent to checks must be sought each time the check is renewed on an existing carer or back up carer, and they should be asked to sign their consent on the review form. Staff carrying out the checks should ensure that the carer's consent is up to date.

A copy of the signed consent of the applicant or existing carer should be attached to all letters sent out to other agencies requesting checks.

1.5 Confidentiality

It is essential that information received and provided about applicants and existing carers is kept confidential and is only shared with authorised recipients.

All correspondence relating to checks and searches should be clearly marked **“Private and Confidential”** and should be addressed only to the authorised recipient. If there is no named person, letters should be addressed to the head of the service.

Copies of all documentation and correspondence relating to checks should be uploaded into the relevant episode on the applicant’s MOSAIC case record and hard copies kept securely by the administrator.

2: Procedure for taking out checks and searches on existing carers and applicants to Camden

2.1 DBS checks

The Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006 requires anyone working with or involved in the care of children to have undergone checks to ensure that they have not been barred from working with children. This means Camden must carry out checks with the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) on the following in order to ensure that any child who is placed by Camden will be living in a safe and suitable environment:

- all prospective alternative carers
- members of their household who are over 16 years old
- anyone who is named as part of the carer’s support network (back up carers) who will be involved in caring for the child but does not reside with the carer
- regular visitors to the household who are over 18 years old and who are likely to have unsupervised access to the child.

Existing carers should have their DBS check renewed every 3 years.

Social workers should note that DBS checks take some time to be carried out. If information on criminal records is required in an emergency, for example when placing a child with a Regulation 24 carer or as part of a section 47 enquiry, social workers should refer to the “Police Checks” policy. Police checks are separate from DBS checks as they are carried out by the Child Abuse Investigation Team, and not the DBS. [Police checks | Children's Policy & Practice Hub](#)

Foster carers and the child's social worker will decide if it is safe for a child to stay overnight with friends, and it is not necessary to take out DBS checks in these circumstances unless specifically requested by the child's social worker. Please refer to the *Social visits* policy. [Social Visits \(Including Overnight Stays\)](#)

Applications for a DBS check can be made on-line via the DBS website at:
<https://gbg.onlinedisclosures.co.uk/Authentication/Login?ReturnUrl=%2fLanding%2fLandingPage>

Social workers should go online to create a new applicant on the system by providing the applicants full name and email address. Following this, the applicant will be sent an automated email from the DBS asking them to provide information to prove their identity and address which they must reply to in order to further the application.

Social workers should have sight of any supporting documentation in its original format that is sent in to support an application and should go online to verify that the documentation has been seen.

Applications should be made for all prospective carers or existing carers requiring a renewed DBS check, as well as household members, regular visitors and members of the carer's support network. Applicants and existing carers need to provide supporting documents in order to prove their identity so that the DBS check is carried out against the right individual.

When the check has been completed, the DBS will update the status and result of the application online. Social workers should check the application status online to find out the outcome of the check and record this in the checks and searches episode on MOSAIC.

If the outcome of the check shows that the applicant or carer has convictions, this fact should be recorded on the MOSAIC record, but details of convictions should not be disclosed.

The assessing or supervising social worker should then request details of convictions from the Head of Service and inform the BSS officer of the convictions so that the Probation check may be carried out.

2.2 Probation checks

Probation checks can only be carried out once the DBS check has been returned, and a conviction has been disclosed and should be carried out by the social worker. Any correspondence should be sent to the local probation office enclosing a copy of the DBS disclosure as no check will be carried out without this. Contact details of all regional probation offices can be found via the weblink below.

The social worker should check the online disclosure to identity of the relevant local probation office, and each office should be contacted for further information.

Requests for probation checks should be sent by email and social workers should ensure that information on names and dates of birth of household members and the length of time they have lived at the address are copied accurately.

Probation checks must be carried out whenever a DBS check discloses a conviction; this is the case for existing and prospective carers, and members of their household/support network.

A copy of the applicant or existing carer's signed consent to probation checks should be sent with the email request. A copy of the letter should be kept on the applicant's file, and the date the letter was sent out should be entered on the tracking database.

The following weblink contains contact details for all local probation offices.

[Probation Service England and Wales regional maps - GOV.UK](#)

2.3 Health and medical reports

The following prospective and existing carers are obliged to have a medical in support of their application:

- adopters
- foster carers
- special guardians
- applicants for non-agency adoptions except for step-parents.

Medical reports are only valid for 2 years and must be renewed for all existing carers. Medical information should be recorded on BAAF form AH; this form should be given to applicants along with their application form. The medical pack contains:

- Form AH
- GP's claim form (where applicable).

When the completed medical form is returned to the BSS by email or fax, the original should be forwarded on to Camden's medical adviser by email requesting that their comments are added to the form. The completed medical form AH should be uploaded onto the relevant episode on the applicant's MOSAIC record.

GP claim form

Camden will process GP's medical expenses and pass claims to the NHS Direct for payment, for applicants who wish to become foster carers, existing foster carers and special guardians where Camden supported the application.

Adopters need to pay these expenses themselves, directly to their GP.

The completed claim form should be returned with the AH medical form, and the BSS officer should complete the section of the form on Camden's behalf by indicating the type of application (ie: foster carer), and signing and dating the form. The administrator should also ensure that the GP's details have been completed correctly.

Once the form has been completed, it should be forwarded on for payment by email and a copy of the form and the letter uploaded onto the relevant episode of the applicant or carer's MOSAIC record.

Medical forms returned from the medical adviser

Once the medical adviser has added their comments and recommendations on the medical form, the form will be returned to the BSS who should pass on details to the assessing or supervising social worker to implement the recommendations, and record the medical advisor's comments in the notes section of the tracking database. The date the form was returned should be recorded on the tracking database.

Depending on the medical adviser's comments and recommendations, the assessing or supervising social worker may need to contact them for clarification or further information, and this information should also be recorded in the notes section of the tracking database.

2.4 Local authority checks

Checks must be taken up with the local authority where the applicant or existing carer has lived in the past 10 years. If they have changed address within that time, checks must be taken up with their previous local authority, covering a 10 year period.

It is further recommended that where assessing or supervising social workers believe that important information may be contained on local authority files going back further than 10 years, requests for checks should be made to the relevant local authority. For example, if the applicant worked with children or raised children with a previous partner more than 10 years previously, the relevant local authority may be approached to carry out checks.

Assessing social workers should discuss any further enquiries with the applicant and obtain their consent before making arrangements for these checks to be taken up by providing the BSS officer with the necessary information.

Local authority checks need to be taken up with the following:

- Area social services offices and Early Help
- Central child protection services (Quality Assurance Service)
- Archives
- Area mental health offices
- Education
- Ofsted (for enquiries on childminders)
- Area health authority (or the GP where health authorities do not hold centralised information on individuals)
- Probation (see earlier entry)

BSS officers are responsible for sending out requests for these checks and should use the spreadsheet of contacts to find out contact details for Camden and other local authorities.

Taking out checks

Applicant's and existing carer's addresses should be checked against the Camden street index to establish whether their address is within the borough. Care Provision.

Requests for checks should be on the standard letter and administrators should ensure that information on names and dates of birth of household members and the length of time they have lived at the address are recorded accurately.

For Camden addresses, copies of the request letters should be sent to the following:

- Records management
- Quality Assurance Service
- Mental health South
- Mental health North
- Education Welfare Service
- Camden & Islington Health Authority
- Children's Health and Development, Greenland Road Clinic
- Ofsted
- NSPCC

A copy of the applicant or existing carer's signed consent should be attached to each letter of request, and each letter should be sent with a freepost envelope containing the relevant return address. Copies of all request letters should be uploaded onto the applicant's MOSAIC record, and the date the letters were sent out should be entered on the tracking database.

Information on adults who pose a risk to children

Information about adults who pose a risk to children is kept on a separate part of MOSAIC and can only be accessed by the LADO or the LADO support officer based in the Quality Assurance Service. This information will relate to adults for whom there is a Bichard notification or who have been investigated by the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) following an allegation of harm against a child with whom they work.

If an adult is known, a message will appear on the front screen of the MOSAIC record advising staff to contact the Service for further information. The LADO support officer carrying out searches as requested by BSS officers should check that consent to checks has been provided before searching.

Replying to checks

In response to any requests staff should only state whether or not the applicant or existing carer is known to their service, and the name of the relevant worker who can provide detailed information. No specific details of involvement should be given

at this point. The completed reply form should be signed by the member of staff who carried out the check and returned to the BSS officer who requested the check.

2.5 Employment checks

Applicants are normally asked to provide details of their employment over the last 5 years. They are also asked for all details of any employment where they were in direct contact with children.

In order to verify this information, employers are requested to confirm details of employment and provide information on any disputes or disciplinary action involving the applicant. In the case of self-employed applicants, the request should be sent to their accountant to verify the length of self-employment.

If no information is available, for example the applicant does not have an accountant, the matter should be passed to the service manager for a decision on what further sources of information should be pursued. This should be noted on the tracking database.

Requests for employment references must be sent to the applicant's employers of the last 5 years and all employers where the applicant was working directly with children, using the standard letter. Letters should be addressed to the manager of the Human Resources Department, and a copy of the applicant's signed consent should be attached.

A copy of the letter should be uploaded onto the applicant's MOSAIC record, and the date that the letter was sent recorded on the tracking database. Responses from replies to requests should also be recorded.

2.6 NSPCC checks

Although not legally required, NSPCC checks are recommended by BAAF and taken out by many local authorities as the NSPCC holds information on contact with individuals and families, helpline contacts and children receiving therapy via NSPCC.

Requests for searches should be made on the standard letter, enclosing the applicant or existing carer's consent. Individual consent forms should be signed by household members over 18 years. A copy of the letter should be uploaded onto the applicant's MOSAIC record, and the date that the letter was sent recorded on the tracking database.

2.7 Personal references

Applicants will be asked to provide the names and addresses of 4 personal referees, (one of which can be a family member) all of whom should be contacted and requested to provide a reference.

BSS officers should email the referee and enclosing the referee questionnaire form. A copy of the applicant's signed consent should also be sent. Referees should return the completed reference by email.

2.8 GP references

GPs are asked to provide a reference based on their professional involvement with the applicant, rather than a personal reference. The same procedures should be followed. Where joint applicants have different GPs, references should be sought from both GPs.

If GPs request payment for providing the reference, claim forms should be forwarded on to the health authority as detailed for claims for carrying out medical assessments.

A copy of the letter requesting the reference should be uploaded onto the applicant's MOSAIC record and the date the letter was sent recorded on the tracking database.

2.9 Ofsted

If the applicant or existing carer is registered as a childminder or has indicated that they have applied to register, checks may be taken out with Ofsted as the registering body for information they may hold.

Requests should be made on the standard letter, with a copy of the applicant or existing carer's signed consent attached, and a freepost envelope enclosed for the reply. A copy of the letter requesting the reference should be uploaded onto the applicant's MOSAIC record and the date the letter was sent recorded on the tracking database.

2.10 Taking out checks with other local authorities

If an applicant or existing carer currently lives or has lived outside of Camden at any time within the 10 year period, checks need to be taken out with the relevant local authority.

Social workers may also request BSS officers to take out checks with another local authority going further back than 10 years because the applicant has either worked with children or raised children in another local authority area.

Requests should be made for checks to be carried out on information the local authority holds regarding social services records, archives, mental health services, child protection services and the local health authority. Checks with Ofsted, Probation and the NSPCC should be made directly to those agencies by the Camden BSS officer.

Requests for checks to be carried out by other local authorities should be on the standard letter. The applicant or existing carer's signed consent should be attached to this letter and a freepost envelope with the relevant return address provided to return the search. A copy of the letter should be uploaded onto the applicant's MOSAIC record.

Some local authorities do not carry out all the statutory local authority checks and will expect Camden to carry out its own enquiries. Where this is the case, the local authority should provide contact details for those agencies so that BSS officers can request checks.

If this information is not provided, administrators should contact the local authority and request contact details. The letters sent directly to agencies requesting checks should be on the standard letter.

If no records are held by the local health authority, the GP's reference should be relied on.

2.11 Dealing with replies

When a reply to a request is returned, the BSS should check that it has been signed and return any unsigned replies. A copy of the unsigned reply should be uploaded onto the applicant's or carer's MOSAIC record until the signed reply is returned.

Signed replies should be uploaded onto the applicant's or carer's MOSAIC record and where the response is that the applicant is known, this information should be passed on to the assessing social worker for further investigation.

The date the reply was returned and, only if the applicant or carer is known, the outcome of the check should be recorded on the tracking database and the name of the social worker carrying out further investigations noted.

When all checks are completed, BSS officers should print off the tracking database record and sign to confirm each check is complete, and pass the returns and the tracking database record to the relevant team manager for checking and signing against all relevant checks. The signed copy should be uploaded onto the MOSAIC record.

3. Procedures for carrying out checks on behalf of other local authorities and fostering and adoption agencies

The Family, Friends and Fostering service may be requested by other local authorities or fostering and adoption agencies to carry out checks and searches on their behalf because either the applicant or existing carer they are assessing or reviewing has lived in Camden in the last 10 years or because the applicant is currently a Camden resident.

Checks may also be requested on applicants who lived in Camden more than 10 years previously because the assessing local authority believes the council may hold relevant information about the applicant.

Camden will only be responsible for carrying out statutory local authority searches on information that is held by children's social care and education services in Camden, which includes:

- CSFH and Early Help (available on MOSAIC and carried out by Records Management)
- Quality Assurance Service
- Education

Checks will not be carried out with the following, and contact details must be supplied to the requesting local authority in order to carry out their own enquiries;

- NSPCC
- Ofsted
- Mental health services
- Probation
- District Health Authority.

Local authority checks will only be taken out on the actual applicant or existing carer and not for back up carers. If the request is being made because the local authority or fostering agency are assessing a former Camden foster carer who has since

applied to foster for or transferred to that agency the information requested must be provided within 15 working days.

On receipt of requests to carry out checks, the BSS officer should check the applicant's or existing carer's address against the street index to check that it is a Camden address. BSS should also check that the applicant's or existing carer's signed consent has been attached to the letter, and that for existing carers, the consent has been given since the last checks were taken up.

The date the request was received should be recorded on the action sheet and a standard letter of acknowledgment should be sent to the requesting local authority or fostering and adoption agency detailing which checks will be carried out and giving contact details for the local authority to contact the other agencies.

BSS officers should pass requests for checks to the following, using the same procedures as for carrying out checks for internal applicants detailed in section B.

- Records management
- Quality Assurance Unit/LADO support officer
- Education Welfare Service

The dates that letters requesting searches are sent out and replies returned should be recorded on the action sheet in order to track the requests efficiently.

On receipt of replies

- If the applicant is not known to Camden, the BSS officer should send a letter in response to the requesting agency.
- If the applicant is known, the BSS officer should draft a letter in response to the requesting agency stating that the applicant is known and giving details of the team/service manager that will be able to give relevant details of Camden's involvement with the applicant.
- The letter should be sent to the relevant team/service manager for signing. This is likely to be the Fostering or Permanence teams but if the applicant has been known to CIN or CLA teams the MASH team will be responsible for providing information.
- If the applicant has been known to Early Help services the request should be sent to the Early Help manager based in the Contact Service.

- Copies of all request letters and the replies given should be recorded on MOSAIC.

4. Renewing checks

The following checks must be renewed as shown below for all alternative carers except adopters where an adoption order has already been made:

- DBS checks – every 3 years
- Medical checks – every 2 years
- Local authority checks on the carer's current address – every 3 years.

To renew checks, existing carers should be asked to complete a review form, and BSS officers should follow the procedures for carrying out the original check as detailed above. Information only needs to be updated for the period since the last check was taken out. The relevant team manager is responsible for signing off renewed checks.

Requests from other local authorities or fostering or adoption agencies to renew checks for their existing carers should only be carried out after 3 years and only for the carer.

Where a DBS check is being renewed and there is no up to date check in place, the supervising social worker should carry out a risk assessment and send this to the Head of Service for comment then pass the assessment on to the Director for sign off.

5. Recording information on checks and searches

The tracking database is used to ensure that all statutory checks have been carried out and to identify delays in receiving replies. All applicants who are being assessed by Camden must be added to the tracking database as soon as their formal application has been received and the checking process begun.

At each stage, staff must ensure that the dates that requests for checks are sent out or replies received are recorded on the database.

When all checks on an applicant or existing carer have been requested, their individual record should be uploaded onto the relevant episode of their MOSAIC record to indicate that all statutory checks have been taken out.

Checks and searches on alternative carers

As replies to requests for checks are returned, these should be logged on the tracking database, and when all information has been received, the final record should be printed off and signed by the BSS officer and the team manager/supervisor, and uploaded onto the applicant's or carer's MOSAIC record.